

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

King Solomon's Mines

H. RIDER HAGGARD



Complete and Unabridged

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INTRODUCTION

Now that this book is printed, and about to be given to the world, a sense of its shortcomings, both in style and contents, weighs very heavily upon me. As regards the latter, I can only say that it does not pretend to be a full account of everything we did and saw. There are many things connected with our journey into Kuku-analand that I should have liked to dwell upon at length, to which, as it is, I have scarcely alluded. Amongst these are the curious legends which I collected about the chain armour that saved us from destruction in the great battle of Loo, and also as to the 'Silent Ones' or Colossi at the mouth of the stalactite cave. Again, if I had given way to my own impulses, I should have wished to go into the differences, some of which are to my mind very suggestive, between the Zulu and Kukuana dialects. Also a few pages might have been devoted profitably to the consideration of the indigenous flora and fauna of Kuku-analand.* Then there remains the most interesting subject – that, as it is, has only been touched on incidentally – of the magnificent system of military organisation in force in that country, which, in my opinion, is much superior to that inaugurated by Chaka in Zululand, inasmuch as it permits of even more rapid mobilisation, and does not necessitate the employment of the pernicious system of forced celibacy. Lastly, I have scarcely spoken of the domestic and

* I discovered eight varieties of antelope, with which I was previously totally unacquainted, and many new species of plants, for the most part of the bulbous tribe.

family customs of the Kukuanas, many of which are exceedingly quaint, or of their proficiency in the art of smelting and welding metals. This science they carry to considerable perfection, of which a good example is to be seen in their *tollas*, or heavy throwing knives, the backs of these weapons being made of hammered iron and the edges of beautiful steel, welded with great skill on to the iron frames.

The fact of the matter is, I thought, with Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, that the best plan would be to tell my story in a plain, straightforward manner, and to leave these matters to be dealt with subsequently in whatever way ultimately may appear to be desirable. In the meanwhile I shall, of course, be delighted to give all information in my power to anybody interested in such things.

And now it only remains for me to offer apologies for my blunt way of writing. I can but say in excuse of it that I am more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot make any pretence to the grand literary flights and flourishes which I see in novels – for sometimes I like to read a novel. I suppose they – the flights and flourishes – are desirable, and I regret not being able to supply them. At the same time I cannot help thinking that simple things are always the most impressive, and that books are easier to understand when – like the Bible – they are written in plain language, though perhaps I have no right to set up an opinion on such a matter. 'A sharp spear', runs the Kukuana saying, 'needs no polish;' and on the same principle I venture to hope that a true story, however strange it may be, does not require to be decked out in fine words.

ALLAN QUATERMAIN

CHAPTER ONE

I Meet Sir Henry Curtis

It is a curious thing that at my age – I shall never see sixty again – I should find myself taking up a pen to try to write a history. I wonder what sort of a history it will be when I have finished it, if ever I come to the end of the trip! I have done a good many things in my life, which seems a long one to me, owing to my having begun work so young, perhaps. At an age when other boys are at school I was earning my living in the old colony and Natal. I have been trading, hunting, fighting or exploring ever since. And yet it is only eight months ago that I made my pile. It is a big pile now that I have got it – I don't yet know how big – but I do not think I would go through the last fifteen or sixteen months again for it; no, not if I knew that I should come out safe at the end, pile and all. But then I am a timid man, and dislike violence; moreover, I am almost sick of adventure. I wonder why I am going to write this book; it is not in my line. I am not a literary man, though very devoted to the Old Testament and also to the *Ingoldsby Legends*. Let me try to set down my reasons, just to see if I have any.

First reason: Because Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good asked me.

Second reason: Because I am laid up here at Durban with the pain in my left leg. Ever since that confounded lion got hold of me I have been liable to this trouble, and being rather bad just now, it makes me limp more than ever. There must be some poison in a lion's teeth, otherwise how is it that when your wounds are healed they break out again, generally, mark you, at the same time of year that you got your mauling? It is a hard thing when one has shot sixty-five lions or more, as I have in the course of my life, that the

sixty-sixth should chew your leg like a quid of tobacco. It breaks the routine of the thing and, putting other considerations aside, I am an orderly man and don't like that. This is by the way.

Third reason: Because I want my boy Harry, who is over there at the hospital in London studying to become a doctor, to have something to amuse him and keep him out of mischief for a week or so. Hospital work must sometimes pall and grow rather dull, for even of cutting up dead bodies there may come satiety, and as this history will not be dull, whatever else it may be, it will put a little life into things for a day or two while Harry is reading of our adventures.

Fourth reason and last: Because I am going to tell the strangest story that I remember. It may seem a queer thing to say, especially considering that there is no woman in it – except Foulata. Stop though! There is Gagaoola, if she was a woman and not a fiend. But she was a hundred at least, and therefore not marriageable, so I don't count her. At any rate, I can safely say that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history.

Well, I had better come to the yoke. It is a stiff place, and I feel as though I were bogged up to the axle. But *sutjes, sutjes* – as the Boers say – I am sure I don't know how they spell it – softly does it. A strong team will come through at last, that is if they are not too poor. You can never do anything with poor oxen. Now to make a start.

I, Allan Quatermain, of Durban, Natal, Gentleman, make oath and say – That's how I headed my deposition before the magistrate about poor Khiva's and Ventvögel's sad deaths; but somehow it doesn't seem quite the right way to begin a book. And, besides, am I a gentleman? What is a gentleman? I don't quite know, and yet I have had to do with niggers – no, I will scratch out that word 'niggers', for I do not like it: I've known natives who *are*, and so you will say, Harry, my boy, before you have done with this tale, and I have known mean whites with lots of money and fresh out from home, too, who *are not*.

At any rate, I was born a gentleman, though I have been nothing but a poor travelling trader and hunter all my life. Whether I have remained so I know not, you must judge of that. Heaven knows

I've tried. I have killed many men in my time, yet I have never slain wantonly or stained my hand in innocent blood, but only in self-defence. The Almighty gave us our lives, and I suppose He meant us to defend them, at least I have always acted on that, and I hope it will not be brought up against me when my clock strikes. There, there, it is a cruel and wicked world, and for a timid man I have been mixed up in a deal of fighting. I cannot tell the rights of it, but at any rate I have never stolen, though once I cheated a Kafir out of a herd of cattle. But then he had done me a dirty turn, and it has troubled me ever since into the bargain.

Well, it is eighteen months or so ago since first I met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good. It was in this way. I had been up elephant hunting beyond Bamangwato, and had met with bad luck. Everything went wrong that trip, and to top up with I got the fever badly. So soon as I was well enough I trekked down to the Diamond Fields, sold such ivory as I had, together with my wagon and oxen, discharged my hunters, and took the postcart to the Cape. After spending a week in Cape Town finding that they overcharged me at the hotel, and having seen everything there was to see, including the botanical gardens, which seem to me likely to confer a great benefit on the country, and the new Houses of Parliament, which I expect will do nothing of the sort, I determined to go back to Natal by the *Dunkeld*, then lying at the docks waiting for the *Edinburgh Castle* due in from England. I took my berth and went aboard, and that afternoon the Natal passengers from the *Edinburgh Castle* transhipped, and we weighed and put out to sea.

Among these passengers who came on board were two who excited my curiosity. One, a gentleman of about thirty, was perhaps the biggest-chested and longest-armed man I ever saw. He had yellow hair, a thick yellow beard, clear-cut features, and large grey eyes set deep in his head. I never saw a finer-looking man, and somehow he reminded me of an ancient Dane. Not that I know much of ancient Danes, though I knew a modern Dane who did me out of ten pounds; but I remember once seeing a picture of some of those gentry, who, I take it, were a kind of

white Zulus. They were drinking out of big horns, and their long hair hung down their backs. As I looked at my friend standing there by the companion-ladder, I thought that if he only let his grow a little, put one of those chain shirts on to his great shoulders, and took hold of a battle-axe and a horn mug, he might have sat as a model for that picture. By the way it is a curious thing, and just shows how the blood will out, I discovered afterwards that Sir Henry Curtis, for that was the big man's name, is of Danish blood.* Also he reminded me strongly of somebody else, but at the time I could not remember who it was.

The other man, who stood talking to Sir Henry, was stout and dark, and of quite a different cut. I suspected at once that he was a naval officer; I don't know why, but it is difficult to mistake a navy man. I have gone on shooting trips with several of them in the course of my life, and they have always proved themselves the best and bravest and nicest fellows I ever met, though sadly given, some of them, to the use of profane language. I asked a page or two back, what is a gentleman? I'll answer the question now: a Royal Naval officer is, in a general sort of way, though of course there may be a black sheep among them here and there. I fancy it is just the wide seas and the breath of God's winds that wash their hearts and blow the bitterness out of their minds and make them what men ought to be.

Well, to return, I proved right again; I ascertained that the dark man was a naval officer, a lieutenant of thirty-one, who, after seventeen years' service, had been turned out of her majesty's employ with the barren honour of a commander's rank, because it was impossible that he should be promoted. This is what people who serve the queen have to expect: to be shot out into the cold world to find a living just when they are beginning really to understand their work, and to reach the prime of life. I suppose they don't mind it, but for my own part I had rather earn my bread

* Mr Quatermain's ideas about ancient Danes seem to be rather confused; we have always understood that they were dark-haired people. Probably he was thinking of Saxons. ED.

as a hunter. One's halfpence are as scarce perhaps, but you do not get so many kicks.

The officer's name I found out – by referring to the passengers' list – was Good – Captain John Good. He was broad, of medium height, dark, stout, and rather a curious man to look at. He was so very neat and so very clean-shaved, and he always wore an eyeglass in his right eye. It seemed to grow there, for it had no string, and he never took it out except to wipe it. At first I thought he used to sleep in it, but afterwards I found that this was a mistake. He put it in his trousers pocket when he went to bed, together with his false teeth, of which he had two beautiful sets that, my own being none of the best, have often caused me to break the tenth commandment. But I am anticipating.

Soon after we had got under way evening closed in, and brought with it very dirty weather. A keen breeze sprung up off land, and a kind of aggravated Scotch mist soon drove everybody from the deck. As for the *Dunkeld*, she is a flat-bottomed punt, and going up light as she was, she rolled very heavily. It almost seemed as though she would go right over, but she never did. It was quite impossible to walk about, so I stood near the engines where it was warm, and amused myself with watching the pendulum, which was fixed opposite to me, swinging backwards and forwards as the vessel rolled, and marking the angle she touched at each lurch.

'That pendulum's wrong; it is not properly weighted,' suddenly said a somewhat testy voice at my shoulder. Looking round I saw the naval officer whom I had noticed when the passengers came aboard.

'Indeed, now what makes you think so?' I asked.

'Think so. I don't think at all. Why there – ' as she righted herself after a roll, 'if the ship had really rolled to the degree that thing pointed to, then she would never have rolled again, that's all. But it is just like these merchant skippers, they always are so confoundedly careless.'

Just then the dinner-bell rang, and I was not sorry, for it is a dreadful thing to have to listen to an officer of the Royal Navy when he gets on to that subject. I only know one worse thing, and

it is to hear a merchant skipper express his candid opinion of officers of the Royal Navy.

Captain Good and I went down to dinner together, and there we found Sir Henry Curtis already seated. He and Captain Good were placed together, and I sat opposite to them. The captain and I soon fell into talk about shooting and what not; he asking me many questions, for he is very inquisitive about all sorts of things, and I answering them as well as I could. Presently he got on to elephants.

'Ah, sir,' called out somebody who was sitting near me, 'you've reached the right man for that; Hunter Quatermain should be able to tell you about elephants if anybody can.'

Sir Henry, who had been sitting quite quiet listening to our talk, started visibly.

'Excuse me, sir,' he said, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low deep voice, a very suitable voice, it seemed to me, to come out of those great lungs. 'Excuse me, sir, but is your name Allan Quatermain?'

I said that it was.

The big man made no further remark, but I heard him mutter 'fortunate' into his beard.

Presently dinner came to an end, and as we were leaving the saloon Sir Henry strolled up and asked me if we would come into his cabin to smoke a pipe. We accepted, and he led the way to the *Dunkeld* deck cabin, and a very good cabin it is. It had been two cabins, but when Sir Garnet Wolseley or one of those big swells went down the coast in the *Dunkeld*, they knocked away the partition and have never put it up again. There was a sofa in the cabin, and a little table in front of it. Sir Henry sent the steward for a bottle of whisky, and the three of us sat down and lit our pipes.

'Mr Quatermain,' said Sir Henry Curtis, when the man had brought the whisky and lit the lamp, 'the year before last about this time, you were, I believe, at a place called Bamangwato, to the north of the Transvaal.'

'I was,' I answered, rather surprised that this gentleman should be so well acquainted with my movements, which were not, so far as I was aware, considered of general interest.

'You were trading there, were you not?' put in Captain Good, in his quick way.

'I was. I took up a wagonload of goods, made a camp outside the settlement, and stopped till I had sold them.'

Sir Henry was sitting opposite to me in a Madeira chair, his arms leaning on the table. He now looked up, fixing his large grey eyes full upon my face. There was a curious anxiety in them, I thought.

'Did you happen to meet a man called Neville there?'

'Oh, yes; he outspanned alongside of me for a fortnight to rest his oxen before going on to the interior. I had a letter from a lawyer a few months back, asking me if I knew what had become of him, which I answered to the best of my ability at the time.'

'Yes,' said Sir Henry, 'your letter was forwarded to me. You said in it that the gentleman called Neville left Bamangwato at the beginning of May in a wagon with a driver, a *voorlooper*, and a Kafir hunter called Jim, announcing his intention of trekking if possible as far as Inyati, the extreme trading post in the Matabele country, where he would sell his wagon and proceed on foot. You also said that he did sell his wagon, for six months afterwards you saw the wagon in the possession of a Portuguese trader, who told you that he had bought it at Inyati from a white man whose name he had forgotten, and that he believed the white man with the native servant had started off for the interior on a shooting trip.'

'Yes.'

Then came a pause.

'Mr Quatermain,' said Sir Henry suddenly, 'I suppose you know or can guess nothing more of the reasons of my – of Mr Neville's journey to the northward, or as to what point that journey was directed?'

'I heard something,' I answered, and stopped. The subject was one which I did not care to discuss.

Sir Henry and Captain Good looked at each other, and Captain Good nodded.

'Mr Quatermain,' went on the former, 'I am going to tell you a story, and ask your advice, and perhaps your assistance. The agent who forwarded me your letter told me that I might rely upon it

implicitly, as you were, he said, well known and universally respected in Natal, and especially noted for your discretion.'

I bowed and drank some whisky and water to hide my confusion, for I am a modest man – and Sir Henry went on.

'Mr Neville was my brother.'

'Oh,' I said, starting, for now I knew of whom Sir Henry had reminded me when first I saw him. His brother was a much smaller man and had a dark beard, but now that I thought of it, he possessed eyes of the same shade of grey and with the same keen look in them: the features too were not unlike.

'He was,' went on Sir Henry, 'my only and younger brother, and till five years ago I do not suppose that we were ever a month away from each other. But just about five years ago a misfortune befell us, as sometimes does happen in families. We quarrelled bitterly, and I behaved unjustly to my brother in my anger.'

Here Captain Good nodded his head vigorously to himself. The ship gave a big roll just then, so that the looking-glass, which was fixed opposite us to starboard, was for a moment nearly over our heads, and as I was sitting with my hands in my pockets and staring upwards, I could see him nodding like anything.

'As I daresay you know,' went on Sir Henry, 'if a man dies intestate, and has no property but land, real property it is called in England, it all descends to his eldest son. It so happened that just at the time when we quarrelled our father died intestate. He had put off making his will until it was too late. The result was that my brother, who had not been brought up to any profession, was left without a penny. Of course it would have been my duty to provide for him, but at the time the quarrel between us was so bitter that I did not – to my shame I say it (and he sighed deeply) – offer to do anything. It was not that I grudged him justice, but I waited for him to make advances and he made none. I am sorry to trouble you with all this, Mr Quatermain, but I must to make things clear, eh, Good?'

'Quite so, quite so,' said the captain. 'Mr Quatermain will, I am sure, keep this history to himself.'

'Of course,' said I, for I rather pride myself on my discretion, for which, as Sir Henry had heard, I have some repute.